

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
August 18, 2020

PUBLIC CONCERNS – None

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, August 18, 2020 at 6:00 P.M. at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center located 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, NC 28697 with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman David Gambill, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, and Commissioner Brian S. Minton.

Also present for the meeting were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Eddie Settle welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION – Vice Chairman David Gambill led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Settle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Commissioner Brian S. Minton, seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on August 4, 2020.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Motion was made by Vice Chairman David Gambill to approve Budget Amendment No. 8 (General – Sheriff – This request is to transfer a COVID JAG grant of \$34,501 that the sheriff's Department received at the end of June that transferred into fund balance on June 30, 2020 to current fiscal year. Funds will be used to purchase COVID related items such as PPE gloves, mask, wipes, as well as thermal scanners for public buildings to include the sheriff's office and jail). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

Commissioner Elmore asked if East Middle School is the best location for this base. Tim Pennington, EMS Director replied yes according to the data it is. Commissioner Elmore asked if they have developed a countywide plan or are they expanding and placing bases as the need arises. Mr. Pennington replied in the future as the Board wishes to expand the next area of concentration would be near Boomer, Moravian Falls, Ferguson area. He added no specific location has been pinpointed. Commissioner Elmore stated it is good that they have a plan to expand EMS services where needed. He added it is similar to the Middle and High Schools plan and the placement of each of these in each district. Commissioner Elmore stated moving forward hopefully they have a master plan for EMS placement throughout the county. Mr. Pennington stated when the numbers come back on their data it was very similar to the placement of the Middle Schools. He added most likely both plans used the same population and

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convenience in placement data. Commissioner Elmore stated the cost estimate is \$285,000 with no land cost. Mr. Pennington replied yes. Mr. Yates added they try to overestimate just a little so they do not have to come back and ask for more funds.

Commissioner Elmore asked if the Shepherd's Crossroads Base will move. Mr. Pennington replies yes. Commissioner Elmore stated they are moving further away from LP, Tyson Feed Mill, and CertainTeed. There are a lot of workers there, the population may not be there, but they need to keep this in mind. This is concerning and needs to be considered in their plans. Mr. Pennington replied CertainTeed has a full medical response, first responder team on site that operates under the EMS system and does a terrific job taking care of people until they get there. Commissioner Elmore stated that is wonderful and they did not know this.

Commissioner Blevins asked if the population of school kids is taken into consideration in their data. Mr. Pennington replied it is based on geographic call volume. Chairman Settle stated when he provided the data on the circle sheet there were a lot of calls on Hwy 268 and 21. He added this gets them a better 10 minute response to more calls. Mr. Pennington replied the current base was covering about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the county, with these two new bases that will be split to $\frac{1}{4}$ each between Mtn. View and East Middle. Chairman Settle added they need to look at the Boomer area as mentioned once the new stations are in place and the Main Base 1 could be smaller. Mr. Pennington replied there would not be as many trucks there as they would be more spread out.

Commissioner Blevins said he was not aware of \$100,000 for upgrades to the Ag Center. He understood that the sinkhole was repaired at Base 1, and asked if think they are going to have to move. Mr. Pennington said it has been repaired at this time the building is OK. Commissioner Blevins asked if the \$100,000 out of the fund balance is needed now, after they made 14% cuts to the budget. Mr. Pennington replied the concern was a few weeks ago they still could not determine where the water was going, but it may be going under their building. They just didn't know and plan to look into this further. He added if they have to move someone quick that was the reason and need. Chairman Settle stated it has been repaired, but there may still be a hole there. Commissioner Blevins asked if the upfits at the Ag Center could be utilized for something else later. Mr. Yates replied yes, they have discussed during their Emergency Management Meetings to also use this as an emergency shelter. It is very centrally located between the Sheriff's Department, Animal Shelter, DSS and all the folks that would need to cover at the shelter. Commissioner Blevins stated they all agreed to build the EMS in Mtn. View. They need to be careful of how they are spending money out of the fund balance for Capital improvement after cutting the budget to all departments.

Mr. Triplett said as they get further down the road in this process they will need to approve a long term lease on the site with the Board of Education. He added he has spoken with the Board of Education Attorney and expects it to be similar to the Lease for the Mtn. View Base, \$1.00 per year for 99 years that can be terminated at any time. Commissioner Elmore asked if the School Board can give them the property. Chairman Settle asked could they deed it to them. Mr. Triplett replied yes. Chairman Settle stated they do not want to lease it, and thought this was in process for them to own it. He added he has spoken with the Board of Education Chairman

about this and he supports it. Mr. Triplett stated that can be worked out and only wanted to mention to the Board they will have paperwork to approve after the Board of Education approves everything. Commissioner Elmore stated they appreciate everything Mr. Pennington and EMS does.

Commissioner Blevins said he is in favor of expanding EMS and spending money on capital improvements but does not think this is the right time. He added spending \$100,000 at the Ag Center is hard for him to vote for when he understands EMS Base 1 at the Hospital is OK right now. Commissioner Blevins added he appreciates what EMS does and looks forward to future expansions.

Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore to approve Budget Amendment No. 9 (General – Requesting to allocation from fund balance \$285,000 to be used for East Middle EMS Base and \$100,000 for improvements at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center for an emergency location for Base 1 along with upgrades for future shelter needs). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton. Voting on the motion:

Ayes: Chairman Eddie Settle
Vice Chairman David Gambill
Commissioner Keith Elmore
Commissioner Brian S. Minton

Nays: Commissioner Gary D. Blevins

Commissioner Blevins stated they would like to commend Greg Adams and the IT Department on the great job they are doing with the meetings and technology. Chairman Settle asked if they are steaming the meeting live at this time. Mr. Adams replied they are using WebEx currently and are also testing live streaming directly on the county website. This was not advertised because it is still being tested. Mr. Adams stated at the next meeting it will be streamed live on the website. The Board stated this will be a nice addition and the quality with the cameras is much improved. The Board said they look forward to having this ability and the public joining with better quality, sound, and picture.

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS – UPDATE – Chairman Settle welcomed and recognized Larry Taylor, Chairman and Kim Caudill Director, Board of Elections. Chairman Settle asked if they can provide an update on voting sites and election updates in general. Mr. Taylor said he is here to provide some explanation on the Board’s decision for one stop locations. He added as the Board knows they are not in a normal time, things were already strange before COVID, but this caused an additional problem. Mr. Taylor stated they have to consider convenience of location on election day. He added they also offer one stop voting with a wide range of times to vote over a 15 day period, but staffing becomes an issue. He said it is not affordable to do this in all precincts so they have fewer locations. Mr. Taylor said in normal times they had three locations placed around the county to try to meet convenience of locations as much as possible. He added now they have an addition concern of safety to plan for. This resulted in changes to how they made decisions on one stop locations in case of an exposure and

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one had to be shut down. They would lose a site and a crew in that event. Mr. Taylor stated this changed their plans because they had to consider if that happen they would have to make due with the other location. This forced them to centralized the locations for one stop. Mr. Taylor stated in the map they handed out it shows the two locations those chose are centralize to 80% of the voting population being within 7 to 10 miles of one of the locations. In addition, if they lose one of the locations the convenience of getting to the remaining location does not become a significant problem for any group.

Mr. Taylor said they had to find locations that would meet all the criteria required as well as safety and social distancing. He said they wanted the Board and the Citizens to know these decisions were made on requirements from the state and the current circumstances. He added these changes and things they do are for security, integrity and physical safety. Mr. Taylor stated he commends his fellow Board members they are committed to safe, fair, and accurate elections. He said the staff at the Board of Elections have adapted to all the changes and he can't praise them enough in what they have accomplished. They want all citizens in Wilkes to exercise their responsibility to vote and want them to have full access to do this.

Chairman Settle stated they have two sites, the Edwin McGee Center which is hard to find is on Hwy 268 and that road is still under construction. He has been there a lot with Agricultural, but it is a tough place to find and lots of folks do not know where it is located. Chairman Settle stated it is a large building and located just outside of North Wilkesboro City limits. Commissioner Elmore added it is closer to Hwy 18 than Hwy 268. He said it seems like an odd location and does believe that a lot of folks will have a hard time finding it. Kim Caudill, Director stated they will do a lot of media and interviews the two radio stations. Commissioner Elmore stated the roads to it are narrow and hard to navigate. He asked if any of Fire Departments down that way would work better. Ms. Caudill replied they will also be limited to the number of folks that can be inside the voting locations at one time which makes size very important. The example they have right now is for a 3,500 sq. ft. building they would be limited to a total of 17 people. She added they have to space things out, have greeters, masks, one time use pens, and a lot of other requirements. Ms. Caudill said the McGee Center has two large rooms and space and this was a draw to that facility. It is accessible from both 18 and 268. She added they will have large flags out front and put information out on Facebook, the County Website, Media, Newspaper ads with the Cares money they received.

Chairman Settle asked if they petitioned the state to have a third site. Ms. Caudill replied they ask for a waiver to not have a third site because they were only 1600 over the limit for two sites. She added they were not going to be able to staff it, it is very hard to find enough folks to do two sites. Ms. Caudill stated they have already added two meetings each week beginning the end of September to process absentee ballots. They have already received 1300 request which is almost as many as they did the past two presidential elections combined. Commissioner Blevins asked about the auxiliary gym at East Wilkes. Ms. Caudill replied the sites have to be ADA compliant, have enough parking and many other requirements. She added the owners have to be willing to allow them to use it for 2 1/2 weeks, which can be an issue as well.

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Chairman Settle stated the Civic Center is a great location. Commissioner Blevins stated this is a decision for the Board of Elections and it is not up to them. They can make suggestions and help to coordinate, but they do not know all the technical issues they have to deal with. Commissioner Blevins stated this entire Board have long admired and appreciated the integrity of the staff in the Elections Office in Wilkes County. He added Wilkes County is responsible for every penny of the cost for the elections and agrees they do not need to spend any more than is fair and equitable to have an election. Commissioner Blevins said they understand the staffing issues and getting folks to work these dates and times and the citizens need to understand they have a responsibility to go out and vote. Commissioner Blevins stated they are doing a good job and he is satisfied with what they have done and thinks people who want to vote will.

Chairman Settle said this Board appreciates all they have done, they are not upset with anything and just wanted the public to know this is what has happened and where the sites are and why the decision was made. Commissioner Blevins stated the mail in ballots is concerning, convenience is second to making sure a person is who they say they are and has a right to vote. Ms. Caudill replied the absentee process is verified. She said they are required to fill out a state form to request an absentee ballot. They have to list their name, date of birth, driver's license number or last four of their social security number, address and sign it. Once they get it in their office they enter the information and are linked to those agencies to validate it to make sure it all matches. Mr. Caudill stated they do not process it unless it all matches. She added they will still have all the ways for folks to vote to include one stop and polls open on election day. It will look different, but they will still have all of these choices to include absentee.

Chairman Settle said the mail in ballots is very concerning. Vice Chairman Gambill added the Board of Elections does a good job, he would like to suggest that in the future on voting days the sites should be located at the Middle and High Schools. These are very central and would take them to 8 which should help with staffing, purchasing machines, and all the items needed for elections. Vice Chairman Gambill said they are not sure how to get there, but this would help. Mr. Taylor said they would have to restructure the precincts. Ms. Caudill added the state board of elections would have to approve it, they have an idea precinct size they want them to stay in. She said they will hopefully be redistricting in 2021 and may could merge some at that time. Mr. Taylor added in most counties school is not out for election day as it is in Wilkes, because of this the state board has concerns with using them as polling sites. Commissioner Elmore asked if they combined Edwards. Ms. Caudill replied no they thought they may have to combine some due to workers for this election, but did not.

Chairman Settle and the Board thanked Mr. Taylor and Ms. Caudill for the update.

JCPC BOARD MEMBER REAPPOINTMENTS – Mr. Yates stated Christy Grant, Chair JCPC has sent a letter stating *“The Wilkes County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council is recommending Judge David Byrd as Chief District Judge, Brian Minton as a County Commissioner Appointee and April Marr as a School Designee for appointment of a 2-year term on the board of the JCPC.”* He added it is before the Board for consideration.

Commissioner Gary D. Blevins made a motion to appoint the Honorable David Byrd, Chief District Court Judge, Mr. Brian S. Minton, County Commissioner Appointee, and Ms. April Marr, School Designee for reappointment to the JCPC Board for a 2-year term as requested and presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman David Gambill and unanimously approved.

PURCHASE OF COUNTY-OWNED PROPERTY – EDWARDS TOWNSHIP – Attorney Tony Triplett stated in their packets is a memo and this is two parcels side by side of tax foreclosure property just off Luffman Road in Edwards Township. This is a foreclosure from January 2020 and the county was the bidder at that sale for both parcels. He added a neighbor Mr. Rodrigo Trujillo has made an offer to purchase these properties. Mr. Triplett said as the memo stated he has offered \$4,000 which is \$2,000 for each property. He added this offer is less than the County has in the two parcels, which is \$7,494.35. It is important to point out these parcels are the subject of a Solid Waste Complaint and both parcels has substantial solid waste accumulated on them and will need clean up. Mr. Triplett added Mr. Trujillo has volunteered to conduct the tear down and cleanup with an estimated cost of \$12,000 as part of his offer to purchase. The Board discussed they would like to make sure the property will need to be cleaned up as part of the sale if possible. Mr. Triplett mentioned they will advertise 10-days for upset bids. The final offer will be brought back to the Board, this will get the process started if this is what the Board would like to do.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to publish notice in the *Wilkes Journal-Patriot*, pursuant to G.S. §160A-269, of the offer received from Rodrigo Trujillo on July 1, 2020, for the purchase of property formerly owned by the Heirs of James Monroe Bates, consisting of two adjoining tracts located on Luffman Road in Edwards Township, Wilkes County, North Carolina, the same having been acquired by Wilkes County through tax foreclosure in Deed Book 1301, Page 147, and Deed Book 1301, Page 148, Wilkes County Registry, for \$4,000.00 plus advertising costs, deed preparation, and recording costs; provided, that the County first receives a 5% deposit from Mr. Trujillo; provided further, that the matter continue to be advertised by the County Attorney as required by law in the event of receipt of any upset bids, and that upon the expiration of the upset bid period the matter be brought back to the Board by the County Attorney for action as permitted under G.S. §160A-269. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

ADJOURN - Motion was made by Vice Chairman David Gambill, seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:02 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Eddie Settle, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: September 1, 2020